

A Christmas tale of our times

Father Christmas always has to spend a lot of time planning all those presents and deliveries. It requires enormous skill and teamwork to get all the right presents to everyone on Christmas night, even though of course he is helped by the way the world spins on its axis, extending the night time around the world to a 24 hour period. It does mean a superhuman effort by him and his reindeers, famed for their speed and navigating skills.

In 2020 his helpers came to him and said he did need to do some homework for his deliveries as there were so many new rules applying to all the people he was going to visit. There was a nasty virus spreading its way around the globe, so countries required limited social contact and proper sanitising of goods. The world was so much keener now on green policies, so many of his global family would expect him to watch his carbon output. Anyone buying things today did want to know more about where they came from, who had made them and whether they were socially aware and well governed. Santa above all others must show he is a leader of these movements for the good.

Over the summer Father Christmas was advised that he took some training courses so he was ready for the new management regime. They wanted him to do a general course on Money Laundering. Then there was fraud and bribery to study, to be followed by cyber crime. He should gain a grounding in socially aware present giving, environmentally benign gifts and a course on governance of the parcels business. He needed to ensure he did not fall foul of the ever higher standards for animal welfare for the reindeers, so he needed a module on advanced Reindeer husbandry. He should ask about any new restrictions on fast moving sleighs. Then of course owing to the pandemic everything he did this year has to be Covid compliant. How was he on all the differing rules around the world on social distancing, mask wearing and digital alternatives? He also had to get up to speed with the green necessities, ensuring all gifts were zero carbon and his sleigh ride did not generate too much carbon dioxide from himself and the animals. He needed to be more socially aware, so each gift would need a certificate to prove it had been made in good conditions for the staff, and he would need himself an approval certificate that he had achieved high standards of governance. Then he should answer the stropky email from the EU pointing out that giving lots of goods away was an infringement of single market rules. As it was a form of state aids or unfair competition he would need to apply two months in advance for an exemption certificate, explaining why he should get away with undercutting properly regulated and taxed suppliers.

Father Christmas is a bit of a traditionalist, and was not sure he wanted to spend his summer slaving over all these worldly topics that might take the fun out of Noel. So he compromised with his advisers and agreed to a conference with experts to see what if anything was relevant to him. At the meeting the Diversity Advuiser started asking lots of very personal questions about the elves. What was their background and how did they reflect differing attitudes towards society and the family? The Trade

Union adviser warned him that his workers even on Christmas night would need decent breaks. Was there a written guarantee that none of them were on zero hours contracts or were going to be sacked immediately after the public holiday? The anti Money Laundering Officer told him he could no longer get away with refusing to disclose who paid for all the presents he was dropping off. The Data Protection Officer said he was in possession of vital individual information which was both personal and commercially valuable. All those wish lists for presents needed to be better filed and password protected, preferably with a duo system and complex codes. The criminal lawyer told him he was especially vulnerable to suspicion of bribes, so he needed to keep a register of any mince pies, glasses of wine or tips he was offered during his work.

The cyber expert told him that as many children now sent in text messages, emails or social media posts with all their details, he needed much better cyber protection. He also needed reliable and secure systems of ordering the gifts. A Christmas Grinch could so easily crash his systems, wrecking the only day of the year when he could provide his service. Indeed, on reflection there was a good case for him straddling Christmas over more days to lessen the risk. The Covid compliance officer told him he must wear a face mask in any house he visited, would have to self isolate for fourteen days before his journey, and should either use disposable gloves at each house or take plenty of hand gel. They thought he could probably argue his journey was necessary for work, but leaving the present on the doorstep was much safer. The Animal Welfare expert told him he could no longer rely on just one team of reindeers as the work was too great, so he should train and station relief teams around the world. The Green Adviser proposed a fully automated electric sleigh as a better option. The Social Awareness analyst said he could help supply print outs on the suitability of various gift suppliers which would need to be appended to each present. The Governance Adviser said he would need to be certificated himself as someone who had done a good job organising and leading the delivery service.

Father Christmas was well aware that everything had to go like magic to fit it all into a single night. He was nervous about accepting too many changes to the tried and tested methods he used to deliver the lot. Nor did he welcome too many questions on the detail of how it was managed, as the whole point was its seemingly effortless magic that delivered. No-one must be let down and go without a present. He asked the Green adviser how would the electric sleigh work? Might it need recharging on what is a very long journey, and if so how long would that take? The lack of certainty about this led him to conclude he preferred his old sleigh. He said his reindeer had always managed before and knew the routine to perfection. If a vet certified they were fit before and gave them a check over on return wouldn't that suffice? He couldn't see the point of all the financial requirements. It was after all a free service he offered, and part of the wonder was not knowing how it was all paid for. As to him receiving bribes it was laughable. No-one left him cash or large gifts. They were just being friendly with their mince pies. Given his weight problem it was not something he asked for or wanted.

The advisers then changed their tone and said how delighted they

were to get to meet him in person at last. In order to save the postage they had brought their own family lists with them as that might help in his great task. "So" said Santa, "when it comes to your family you do not seem to have the same worries about CV 19, bribes or how green is my transport. Can I suggest that you and your Regulators turn a blind eye to how I do my job on this unique occasion each year? I doubt you would be happy if I told you that on reflection on all your points it was just too difficult to do this on one special night, so the service was cancelled"

So it transpired that the worried advisers thought this could after all be a rare exception to all the rules. Isn't it good to know Father Christmas is Covid compliant after all? Happy Christmas everyone.